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Considerations for the Organization and Employment of an Operational Reserve

by

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Major Terry W. Bullington, USA, 38 pages

This study is an analysis of the operational reserve. The size, composition, positioning, and political and geographical factors that affect the employment of an operational reserve are discussed. Historical experiences in World War II and current doctrine are considered in the analysis of the operational commander's reserve force.

The study indicates that the current force structure of the U.S. Army and ability to deploy forces to a theater directly affect the employment of an operational-level reserve. Moreover, the operational commander's ability to affect the battle is directly linked to an operational reserve that can maneuver to achieve the desired operational objectives. The size and composition of the operational reserve are less important than the fact an operational reserve is constituted.

The study concludes that an operational reserve is critical to insure the success of operations and campaigns in a theater or operation. Suggestions are offered for the organization and employment of the operational reserve force.

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Introduction:

Today's American soldier is familiar with the terms strategy and tactics. Field Manual 100-5, Operations, (FM 100-5), however, introduces the term "operational level of war," which describes a broad level of military operations between the tactical and strategic levels. The term might be new, but the idea is decades, if not centuries, old. Historical evidence confirms clearly that armies have for a long time practiced what the U.S. Army now calls "the operational art." Only recently has the Army sought to understand how the operational level relates to the overall conduct of war. In a widely accepted definition, the operational level of war is said to encompass the movement, support, and sequential employment of large military forces in the conduct of military campaigns to accomplish goals directed by theater strategy or a higher operational formation.[1]

Just as the Army now recognizes three levels of war, so also must it logically acknowledge the existence of distinct types of reserve forces at each of these levels. Strategic, operational, and tactical reserves coincide directly with each level of war.

Strategic reserves are all assets not employed but available for employment by the strategic-level commander or by his government through his command to affect the outcome of a war. Strategic reserves include elements of the various armed forces. uncommitted stocks of equipment, materiel, and

conventional or nuclear munitions with their delivery means. Strategic reserves may or may not be present initially in the theater where the war is conducted.

Operational reserves normally are uncommitted forces in a theater of operations established by a corps or higher formation for the execution of a specific operation.[2] These operations may include the exploitation of a successful battle or the counterstroke against enemy initiatives in the theater of operations.

Tactical reserves are forces normally within a corps or smaller force that initially are not in direct contact with the enemy, but intended for use by the tactical commander to affect the outcome of his battle.

The intent of this paper is to focus on the operational reserve forces, and to determine if an operational reserve is necessary to insure success in the conduct of operations and campaigns. Many articles are available in professional journals that discuss the concepts of the operational level; however, few if any of these articles specifically address the operational reserve. Official Army doctrine, likewise, discusses the operational level of war in great detail, but only superficially addresses the many considerations relevant to the missions, size, organization, and employment of an operational reserve. This paper addresses each of these areas of consideration.

Just as it is not possible or practical to delineate clearly between each level of war, it is likewise difficult

to draw a clear boundary between each level of reserve. At the extremes of each level of war there is an overlapping of missions applicable to the levels of the reserve forces (See diagram #1). For example, an operational commander may use part of his reserves in support of the tactical battle. This may be necessary to insure he retains flexibility at the operational level. It is also possible that a tactical commander may have part or all of his reserves employed by, and in support of the operational commander's overall plan.

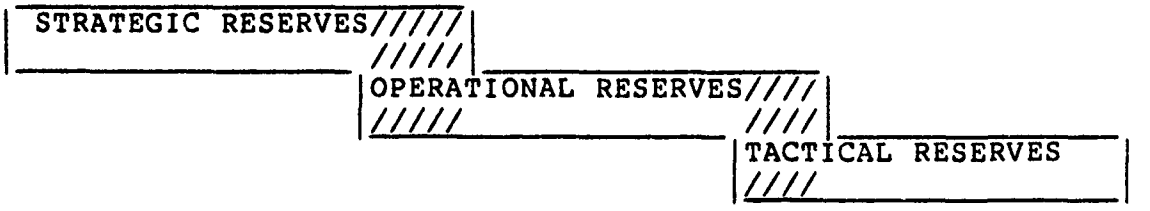

Diagram #1

It should be clear that the reserves at each level are separate and distinct forces, but their missions may overlap or mutually support each other. No matter what the level or origin of the reserve, once committed to combat it fights a tactical battle. Thus, when committed to battle a strategic reserve force is actually fighting at the tactical level, but the commander's overall intent is to produce a desired strategic or operational result through tactical application of the reserve force. Moreover, the commander having committed his reserve loses his flexibility to affect the battle. Only through the reconstitution of another reserve force can the commander regain this lost flexibility. This concept must remain clear in order to understand discussions

of the organization, missions, and application of the operational reserve.

In The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare, Trevor Dupuy calls attention to Napoleon's recognition that hard-fought combat usually is won by the side which last commits its reserves.[3] Despite this admonition, commanders conducting operations during World War II often had no operational reserves available. If Napoleon correctly assessed the crucial need for reserves, then plans for combat should include the employment of operational reserves as well as tactical reserves. Many factors affect the capability of commanders to employ reserve forces, including strength of combat forces available, width of frontages, enemy threat, and intent of the commander.

Missions for Operational Reserves:

To determine the best organization and application of an operational reserve one must first establish appropriate missions likely to be assigned to this reserve force. These missions can best be categorized under the broad headings of offensive and defensive operations.

Common offensive missions appropriate for execution by a reserve force are:[4]

* Weight the Main Effort
* Exploit Success
* Maintain Momentum
* Counter Enemy Counterattacks

* Provide Security

* Complete Destruction of Enemy Forces

* Secure Deep Objectives

The major difference in the execution of these missions at the operational and tactical levels involves time, space, and the commander's intent at each level of command. At the tactical level it is almost impossible to accomplish one of the offensive missions listed previously without the commitment of the reserve force. At the operational level the commander may achieve the desired effect through movement or placement of the reserve force, and yet never commit it to the tactical battle. For the operational reserve to influence the battle prior to its commitment the enemy would be aware of its presence, and then react to that reserve force.

A reserve force employed in a defensive operation is intended to:[5]

* Preserve the Commander's Flexibility

* Conduct Counterattacks

* Exploit Enemy Vulnerabilities

* Reinforce Forward Defensive Operations

* Block Penetrating Enemy Forces

* Counter Threats to the Rear Area

As with the offensive missions, the primary concept for the use of a reserve force differs at the operational and tactical level based on time, space, and the commander's intent.

If one assumes that these traditional missions for reserve forces are applicable for future warfare, and if these missions are not significantly different from reserve force missions of previous warfare, then historical accounts of operational warfare should provide insights into how operational reserves are best employed. Moreover, historical examples should provide evidence as to the best organization and disposition of forces that might be used as an operational reserve.

Historical Considerations for an Operational Reserve:

Unfortunately for the student of U.S. military operations and campaigns, there is little evidence of the employment of operational reserve forces as part of the initial plan for battle. Records of combat in World War II indicate that for U.S. commanders the use of an operational reserve was more a result of the necessity to counter enemy actions rather than part of a well-developed plan to defeat the enemy at the operational level. The absence of reference to an operational reserve is probably a product of a lack of emphasis or understanding of the operational level of war on the part of senior U.S. commanders. Furthermore, it might reflect the fact that, when committed, the reserve is almost always used in a tactical manner and assigned to a tactical commander.

As the Allied forces prepared to break out of the Normandy beachhead, General Collins, commander of the U.S. VII Corps during World War II, made the surprising statement

that he had never had a reserve in any of his fights. General Bradley, commander of the U.S. First Army at Normandy and during the push into Germany, commented at the same time that he went all through Tunisia and Sicily without a regiment of reserve.[6] The tendency of large forces such as Bradley's First Army and Collin's VII Corps to operate without reserves was obviously the norm, since only a few months after the breakout the U.S. commanders had to pull units out of the line to constitute an operational reserve to counter the German offensive in the Ardennes. It is not clear from language used in discussions or from orders issued by U.S. commanders during World War II that they recognized the distinction between the levels of war as currently defined in Army doctrine. It is clear from the study of World War II campaigns and operations that they were operating at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels as we understand them today, and from time to time during the campaigns commanders constituted reserves at each of these levels.

As reflected in their early combat actions, the Germans recognized the significance of operational reserves. Their initial attacks against France in 1940 were successful in part because of their superior use of mobile forces. They held these mobile forces in reserve to exploit success and to strike at the depths of French forces.[7]

The Germans continued to employ operational reserves until their last major offensive in the Ardennes. Even when

Allied forces pushed the German forces back across the broad western front, the Germans concentrated highly mobile forces in reserve. Only when unit strengths fell so low that forces were not available for an operational reserve, or when frontages were so broad that reserves could not be formed from existing units did the Germans fight without operational reserves.

The operational reserve was always foremost in the minds of many German commanders including Field Marshal von Manstein. He felt that even though they were outnumbered, a mobile force in reserve could maneuver into the flank and rear of superior attacking forces to cut lines of communications and facilitate the destruction of an attacking force.[8] He always stressed the advantages of having a highly maneuverable reserve force. U.S. doctrine now recognizes that the concept of maneuver is central to an understanding of the operational level of war.[9]

Opposing the German forces on the eastern front were Soviet forces that rapidly transitioned to the operational level of war. Though it may be an exaggeration to accuse the Soviets of initially engaging in only tactical level warfare, their doctrine shows an evolution from a philosophy of mass in the early stages of the war to an army that focused on planning and executing large-scale maneuver at the tactical and operational levels by the end of the war.

One vivid example of the maturation of the Soviet Army is the battle of Kursk. The examination of the Soviet's use

of their reserve forces during the battle at Kursk aids in the understanding of the employment of a reserve force at the operational level.

The Soviets employed large tank armies in reserve at the battle of Kursk. This marked the first time they employed such formations to provide a powerful and mobile force to counter German attacks. In addition to the tank armies in reserve, each corps developed a mobile group that evolved into what is known today as the Operational Maneuver Group (OMG). This evolution in Soviet organizations came as a result of the experience gained from facing the mobile reserves of the Germans. Previously the Soviets failed to mass their armor to counter the Germans' massed armor and mobile infantry forces. On occasions the Soviets succeeded primarily because of their sheer numbers of forces. Their leadership at the strategic and operational levels continued to reorganize the Soviet forces to counter the superior maneuverability of the Germans. The Soviets learned through experience that the massed armored forces applied by the Germans at the decisive point greatly increased their chances of success whether they were attacking or defending. The Soviets determined that they needed massed mobile forces of their own.

During the battle of Kursk the missions given to the reserve tank armies did not differ from the traditional missions now assigned to reserve forces. They hoped to halt the German attacks against initial defensive positions using

front line forces and tactical reserves. The Soviet plan called for the tactical reserves to counter the German attacks and exploit any success. Soviet leaders referred to the large reserve tank armies as strategic reserves; however, it is clear that they employed these tank armies at the operational level. Initially the Soviets employed small units from the reserve armies tactically to assist in halting or destroying the attacking German forces. Once tactical forces halted the German attacks the remaining operational reserve forces attacked to exploit successes gained by the initial counterattacks. A key to the Soviet's success was the flexibility their commanders retained to concentrate reserve forces to defeat and destroy massed German forces.[10]

The previous example clearly supports Napoleon's contention that the commander who last commits his reserves will be the victor. The Germans committed all of their operational reserves to the initial assault, while the Soviets retained flexibility by withholding significant reserves until the decisive point in the battle. The flexibility afforded the Soviet commanders through the retention of a large uncommitted reserve allowed them to select the decisive point through which to pass a mobile reserve to exploit the tactical success previously gained. For the Germans this spelled disaster in that the high command had failed to reconstitute an operational reserve to counter the Soviet thrust. The German operational commanders had no assets to affect the outcome of the battle. This lack

of an operational reserve forced the German operational commanders to conduct the fight at the tactical level.

These historical examples of the use or failure to use an operational reserve during World War II allow a comparison of how operational commanders might organize and use their reserve today. Key factors of size, composition, positioning, and political and geographical factors affecting the reserve force serve as areas for examining an operational reserve force in the U.S. Army.

The Size of an Operational Reserve:

The size of an operational reserve in most cases depends on the availability of forces to constitute that reserve. Unfortunately for the U.S. Army in Europe today, the time required to deploy forces from other parts of the world is a determining factor in the size of the available operational reserve. Prior to the arrival of augmentation units from CONUS, NATO's operational commanders will find it impossible to meet the force-to-space ratios specified by the NATO strategy of forward defense and still have sufficient forces to create an operational reserve. Troops simply may not be available in the early days of the war to constitute an operational reserve force. This lack of a reserve force, however, should not prevent the commander from planning for the use of an operational reserve once sufficient forces do become available. Indeed, advanced planning is imperative, for until senior combat commanders have operational reserve forces, and clear plans for their employment, they cannot

conduct warfare at the operational level.

The size of an operational reserve depends not only on the availability of forces, but also on the commander's intent and the type of mission he assigns to those forces. That is, the commander must insure that the size of the force in reserve has the means to attain the desired ends. In most cases during World War II and in most likely scenarios for the employment of an operational reserve in the European theater today, the operational reserve needs the capability to counter large Soviet armored forces. This logically leads to the decision to hold large armored forces of tanks and mechanized infantry in reserve. The massing of armor and mechanized infantry may not be the best composition of an operational reserve. Small forces that move rapidly about the battlefield may prove more beneficial than a large force.

During the German defense of the Chir River line in Russia, General Balck, commander of Panzer divisions, corps, and armies in World War II, employed the 11th Panzer Division in reserve to counterattack Soviet breakthroughs. He added the 15th Panzer Regiment to this force. The strength of the regiment averaged no more than 25 tanks. Over a period of several months this severely understrength reserve division destroyed the Soviet 5th Tank Army. General von Mellenthin, a noted World War II German general who held chief-of-staff positions at division, corps, and army level, stated that the Germans constantly found the employment of small units more effective than large.

> I can only stress what General Balck told us about smaller units: that you should avoid big units. It does not matter if it is a company or an Army Corps or a division it is easier to have smaller formations.[12]

This does not mean that only small forces should form the operational reserve, rather the employment of small units, each with a specified mission, make the overall reserve force easier to control. It is clear from the study of many German operations and campaigns that very large forces were in reserve; however, those forces consisted of small units such as regiments and battalions each executing a portion of the overall counterattack to achieve the intent of the operational commander. Common sense and historical evidence demonstrates forcefully that units moving on multiple routes are more difficult to interdict than those moving on a single route. By employing smaller units and synchronizing their efforts at the operational level, the commander retained flexibility and initiative. This flexibility depended on the ability of the overall reserve force to continue to execute the assigned mission even though some individual units were periodically interdicted by enemy elements. Finally, small units on multiple routes moving to a point of concentration allowed the commander to mass the maximum combat power forward.

The use of smaller units also allowed specific objectives to be assigned to each unit. These semi-independent actions by small units forced the Soviets to fight several simultaneous battles on the flank and to the

rear, thus preventing them from massing against a single counterattack.

Another possible advantage gained from the employment of smaller units is the ability to move those forces over numerous routes. This avoids problems encountered when large formations cut across friendly lines of communications.

An operational reserve composed of small units may not always be the best solution. The size of the formation depends on the size of the enemy force that is the target of the operational reserve. Also included in the decision of what size reserve to employ is the disposition of the enemy force. The commander plans attacks against either an uncommitted enemy formation, or an enemy that has broken through forward defenses.

Other factors involved in the commander's decision for organization of the reserve include availability of combat support and combat service support units to provide support to a committed reserve. Additionally the mobility assets to move and support a reserve force weighs heavily in the organizational decision of the commander.

Composition of the Operational Reserve:

The composition of the operational reserve depends on many factors. Most important among these is the results the operational level commander hopes to achieve by employing his reserve. Unlike the tactical commander who designates a reserve to prolong his battle and react to enemy actions, the operational commander specifies a mission for his reserve

that allows him to sequence his fight to achieve the desired outcome at the decisive point in the campaign. When Clausewitz used the term "strategy" he meant what we today call "operations." Accordingly,

> The point at which the concept of a strategic reserve begins to be self-contradictory is not difficult to determine: it comes when the decisive stage of the battle has been reached. All forces must be used to achieve it, and any idea of reserves, of available combat units that are not meant to be used until after this decision, is an absurdity.[13]

An operational force should achieve a decisive outcome that supports the strategic goal. The operational reserve is not organized as a reactive force, but rather as a force employed to achieve the desired results at a decisive point during the battle. The commander must not overlook any assets available to him for employment in his battle. Furthermore, the operational reserve force must have the capability to achieve the intended results once it is committed. It must accomplish its mission before the momentum is lost and the initiative swings to the side of the defender, the culminating point of the attack.

The ideal operational reserve consists of a unit which is self-supporting, highly mobile, and heavy in anti-armor capabilities. Its organization allows all or part of the force to support tactical level commanders in the accomplishment of their missions. Success at the tactical level insures the maintenance of flexibility at the operational level. In addition an operational reserve needs

the capability to react to rear area threats. Most important is the capability to defeat a large enemy force anywhere on the battlefield to include the rear area or areas in front of the forward line of own troops (FLOT).

An operational reserve capable of conducting battle in the rear area, along or in front of the FLOT must have designated units to provide fire support. It is difficult to imagine an operational reserve without its own supporting artillery capable of conducting effective battle in a corps or division rear area. If commanders apply the often accepted practice of placing no artillery in reserve, a critical period of time might pass while artillery initially positioned forward relocates to support the operational reserve in the rear battle. Moreover, if the operational reserve conducts a lengthy lateral movement across a corps or army sector, significant problems develop in linking-up with the fire support units at the moving reserve unit's destination.

Similar problems might occur when operational reserve forces are committed along or forward of the FLOT. When units deployed forward are tasked to provide support to these reserve forces moving forward, careful planning and execution must occur to insure the supporting and supported units are linked-up to conduct the operation effectively. This is not to say that units cannot overcome these problems of support, only that significant problems in coordination and timing exist. One obvious solution is to designate artillery units

as direct support for the operational reserve, and position them to provide support for any mission executed by the reserve. Similar problems in the use of engineers occur if engineers are not a permanent part of an operational reserve.

One of the most challenging problems facing an operational reserve is the control of units while moving along routes to the point of commitment. The Germans faced these problems especially at night. They overcame the chance of units losing their way by the use of Police Traffic Companies which were responsible for leading troops to various locations.[14] The use of military police and scouts offers U.S. forces a possible way to control unit movements.

The operational reserve also needs air support. Army aircraft capable of providing anti-armor fire greatly increase the effects of the reserve against enemy formations. The use of aircraft to provide real-time intelligence about enemy formations and movement offers a chance for modifications or adjustments to the ground tactical plan as the reserve force moves to its destination.

All of the assets previously mentioned are available and would likely be part of any operational reserve. It is also likely that these forces would not be organic to one organization, but instead would be a composite of many units. However, organic units that contain all of these assets do exist, and these units are trained and equipped to work together. These units are the armored cavalry regiments (ACRs).

The employment of ACRs in an operational reserve role requires adjustment of the traditional missions given these units. The first change is the replacement of the ACR in the covering force area. There are at least two possibilities to solve this problem. First is the deployment of highly mobile units such as the 9th Infantry Division well forward to gather information and report on enemy movement. A second alternative is the employment of units of the forward tactical forces to establish their own covering forces.

Statements by General Balck on the organization of German forces in World War II support the concept of the use of highly-mobile armor and mechanized infantry forces to constitute the reserve. In his view German combat experiences proved the need for different types of armored divisions. One of these armored divisions was an anti-breakthrough division placed in reserve. He proposed that this division consist of highly-mobile armored, infantry, and combat engineer forces under army-level control. In addition, he proposed artillery brigades in reserve at army level to counter the attack of enemy forces that broke through.[15] Current ACR organizations offer many of the same advantages as long as they remain equipped with tanks.

The reality of current manpower levels in the U.S. Army may force commanders to constitute operational reserves just as U.S. commanders did in the Ardennes in World War II. Units pulled out of the line were used to form operational reserves. If a shortage of armored forces or enemy actions

requires a commander to form an operational reserve from units in contact, it is possible that the operational reserves might consist initially of light infantry divisions. As the need arose to pull armor or mechanized infantry forces out of combat to constitute a mobile reserve, these light infantry forces could deploy to defend in areas where terrain restricts maneuver. By incorporating the restrictive nature of the terrain into their defense the light infantry forms a "web defense" as proposed by Jim Schneider, Professor of Theory at the School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.[16] Success in this type of operation depends on the availability of assets to move the light infantry. By employing the light infantry initially in reserve the commander retains flexibility. He then replaces the armored forces with the light infantry forces in the best defensible terrain to free the mobile armored forces. This is not an ideal solution, but it may become necessary because of initial shortages of mobile forces to constitute an operational reserve.

One other possibility for the organization of an operational level reserve is the use of tactical reserves by the operational commander. Though it would be unwise for the commander to strip all tactical reserves from divisions, he might designate selected units in tactical reserve as an operational reserve, and adjust frontages covered by tactical units where possible. The operational commander's decision to constitute his reserve from units in tactical reserve

forces him to evaluate the risk involved. The operational commander may risk the defeat of tactical units from which he has pulled forces in an attempt to bring about success of his operational plan.

Positioning the Operational Reserve:

One of the most critical decisions facing the operational commander is the decision where he should position his reserves. A part of this decision is the positioning of reserve forces in relationship to forward forces and anticipated reserve missions. Traditionally one sees a large assembly area designated for reserve units of brigade to corps size. Though this graphic symbol used to depict an assembly area may indicate only a general location for reserve forces the tendency to place a large force in one general area may defeat the very purpose for employment of an operational reserve. There are advantages in disposing a large reserve force across a broad area in smaller unit concentrations.

The first obvious advantage is that smaller units located across a larger area make simultaneous engagement of the entire reserve force more difficult for the enemy. The enemy may face significant problems in delaying or interdicting a reserve that has the capability to mass from different areas along multiple routes. Use of multiple routes by reserve forces to a point of concentration lessens the chance of movement congestion, and allows more combat power to reach a decisive point simultaneously. This

advantage depends on the availability of road nets to support such a move. The dispersion of reserve forces offers a chance to deceive the enemy as to their intended use, and may delay the enemy's ability to organize a force to counter the employment of the operational reserve. Commanders must insure that the movement of the reserve is carefully coordinated once it is committed. Failure to coordinate the movement of reserve forces to the decisive point for employment could result in a piecemeal commitment with the force being defeated in detail.

The placement of forces that make up the operational reserve is most dependent on the plan for their employment. For example aviation assets may occupy positions well to the rear and still move easily to the point of concentration. Less mobile forces need positions closer to the point of their planned employment. If the commander intends to attack a enemy force as it penetrates his defenses, he should place his operational reserve so that its movement strikes over the shortest distance into the flank or rear of the penetrating force. Similarly in the offense the operational reserve must be close enough to assume the battle and take the fight to an operational depth before tactical forces making the initial assault or penetration reach their culminating point.

The timing of the commitment of the reserve is critical. The commander commits the operational reserve to seize the initiative from the enemy, or maintain the initiative.

It is impractical to assign a standard location or distance from the FLOT for the employment of the operational reserve. The major factors in the commander's decision of how he positions his reserve are mobility, routes to the point of concentration, enemy threat, and most importantly, the commander's intent.

Political and Geographical Factors Affecting Employment of an Operational Reserve:

When a commander plans the use of an operational reserve, factors other than the tactical situation and availability of forces affect the plan. Included in the factors that the commander must consider are the political situation and the geographical area in which he operates.

An excellent example of the political impact on the operational reserve is the forward defense policy of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Western Europe. Though the commander may feel he can best defeat an attacking Soviet force by allowing a deep penetration and then attacking the flank and rear of the penetration, this is politically unacceptable to the governments that make up the alliance. The unwillingness to allow enemy penetrations into NATO territory is understandable from the point of view of the politicians and citizens of these countries. Any penetration of the forward defenses subjects the citizens and their properties to destruction by two clashing forces. Therefore, the commander's plan to commit an operational reserve to defeat an enemy would likely call for the

commitment of his reserve to combat in an area along or forward of the FLOT. If successful, this plan would prevent the unacceptable loss of civilian lives and property in allied territory. Hopefully the commander's plan would restrict the battle to the border area or to enemy territory.

The geographical region that makes up the theater of operations greatly influences the planning and commitment of the operational reserve. The vast open area of Russia over which the German Army operated over during World War II differs greatly from the area along the East German border where NATO forces are deployed today. A movement of up to 100 miles in the German front lines in Russia had little strategic significance for German commanders. With the exception of key operational and strategic centers, there was no advantage to holding a specific defensive line. The commanders opted instead to concentrate on mobility and maneuver to defeat the enemy. The Germans allowed penetrations to create a situation where the reserves could attack the flank and rear of Russian formations. The size of the European theater today does not allow the positioning of reserves at great depths in West Germany. In addition to political and humanitarian reasons already mentioned, the allowance of a significant penetration could mean the loss of the entire territory of one or more countries causing a split in the NATO alliance. The necessity to prevent the loss of NATO territory further restricts the commander as he plans for the placement and commitment of an operational reserve.

The political and geographical considerations for the organization of NATO defense forces were the subject of a discussion at a conference on tactical warfare conducted by the BDM Corporation in December, 1980. The participants included Generals Balck and von Mellenthin; General William DePuy (USA, Ret.), former commander of the 1st Infantry Division and U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command; LTG Paul Gorman, former commander of the 8th Infantry Division; and LTG Glenn Otis, former commander of the 1st Armored Division and then Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans. During the conduct of the conference Generals Balck and von Mellenthin were asked to prepare a plan for defense using assets from the U.S. V Corps in the sector assigned to that corps as part of the NATO defense plan. Generals Gorman and Otis also planned a defense for the same sector. Once the groups arrived at the solutions to the defense problem separately, they then compared and discussed them as part of the conference.

Generals Balck and von Mellenthin proposed fewer forces in forward positions in favor of a strong reserve. Their plan called for the enemy force to penetrate along an open avenue to a position where the reserve forces attacked the penetration in the flank and rear. The U.S. Generals proposed a somewhat stronger forward defense with counterattacks by the reserves into the flanks of enemy forces halted forward of the FLOT. Though there was some difference in the organization of forces by each group, the

concepts for defeating the enemy closely paralleled each other. The major difference in the plans occurred in the depth to which each group allowed the enemy force to penetrate before executing the counterattack.[17] Generals Balck and von Mellenthin related their experiences against the Russians in World War II to their concept of the defense in the V Corps area. General von Mellenthin stated,

> The constant numerical superiority of the Russians led us to decide against rigid defense in Russia. We favored small forces along the front lines, and we concentrated the tanks far back for counterattacks to the flank and rear. Even today we think rigid defense is dangerous. Mobile defense, which unexpectedly confronts the Russian constantly with new situations, confuses him and disrupts his concept.[18]

The discussion of the solutions for defending the sector highlighted the dilemma facing NATO commanders today. The German Generals felt the farther the Soviet forces penetrated the easier it was to defeat them by maneuvering NATO mobile reserves. However, they agreed that for political and humanitarian reasons limiting the penetration of the enemy force was essential. They conceded that they could not use the reserve to the same depths in West Germany today that they had used their reserves in Russia. General Balck related the NATO commander's situation today to that of the German commander late in World War II.

> We were very much hampered towards the end of the war in our mobility, because we could not let the Russians get into areas that were settled by Germans.[19]

In contrast to the political and geographical

restrictions affecting the operational reserves in Western Europe, the exact opposite might occur for a force deployed to another theater. Should U.S. forces deploy to the Middle East the commander faces a situation similar to the Germans in Russia during World War II. The sparsely populated area and tremendous distances would certainly affect the positioning and use of operational reserves. Since the depth of the theater might not be a critical factor, the operational commander could use techniques similar to those described by Generals Balck and von Mellenthin. By allowing the enemy to penetrate significant distances to the rear, the reserve force could then counterattack into the flanks and rear of the penetration. Considerations of the political and geographical factors affecting the employment of a reserve force are much less important in an area with few inhabitants and great distances over which to maneuver.

Conclusions:

It is impractical to designate the size of an operational reserve prior to the organization of theater forces for combat. Evidence from World War II indicates that units of battalion or regimental size were very effective against numerically superior forces. The commander's ability to move and maneuver reserve forces to the decisive point on the battlefield was often more important than the size of the force. Even if an entire corps is designated as an operational reserve, the commander should make plans to employ subordinate units of that corps in semi-independent

action to counter enemy initiatives or retain the initiative of friendly forces. Once he commits his reserve force to combat, the operational commander forfeits his ability to affect the battle should the situation change. For this reason a new operational reserve must be designated if the entire initial reserve joins the fight. Again, the size of the reserve will not be as important as the fact the operational commander has a maneuver force with which to influence the operation.

The composition of an operational reserve will vary based on the forces available in the theater and the enemy situation. Operational reserves may be employed in the rear area battle, against enemy penetrating forward positions, or forward of the FLOT in the attack or counterattack. For these reasons the unit needs to be as self-sustaining as possible. The reserve force needs fire support, engineer support, air support, combat service support, and mobility to sustain itself throughout the theater. Any unit could be tailored to accomplish the mission, but the armored cavalry regiment is an excellent organization with organic assets to meet these requirements.

The ACR possesses the mobility and anti-armor capabilities necessary to attack an enemy armored force successfully. These units are not organized or trained specifically to accomplish a reserve mission; therefore, the use of ACRs in a reserve role would require a change in their training and traditional missions.

In relationship to organization and self-sustainment, the use of separate armor or infantry brigades in the reserve role attain many of the same advantages listed for the ACRs. However, the separate infantry brigade lacks the number of tanks desirable in an operational reserve. Both armor and infantry brigades require task organization of their battalions to become an effective combined arms force. Furthermore, the separate armor and infantry brigades have no organic air assets to support their battle. Each ACR has its own organic air assets as well as a mix of armor and infantry elements in each squadron. These armor and infantry elements train routinely as combined arms teams.

The positioning of an operational reserve force is most dependent on its intended use by the commander. If the operational reserve is detected and effectively suppressed or interdicted by the enemy, the entire operational plan may be jeopardized. To prevent this from happening the operational reserve should be positioned across a broad front in the general area of its possible employment. Subordinate units can still be grouped under one controlling headquarters, but their physical locations must be far enough apart to prevent the entire reserve from being attacked simultaneously. Multiple routes for use by subordinate units must be designated, and plans prepared for rapid concentration at the critical area. This disposition of forces allows more rapid reaction to all areas of the theater.

Even though there are strong political and geographical

reasons for a forward defense in NATO, the allies need to look again at the implications of the current defensive strategy. Historically strong defenses with all forces forward have failed. Any defense can be penetrated; therefore, NATO commanders must ask themselves, "What will happen if current defense positions in Europe fail?" Is there a chance to halt a Soviet force once it breaks through NATO defenses along the East German border? The situation is not significantly different from that faced by the Germans during World War II on the eastern front. Only by thinning the forward lines and concentrating highly mobile forces in large reserves to the rear were the Germans able to contend with the numerically superior Soviet forces. The use of operational reserves in depth may be the only way to defeat a Soviet force should they attack West Germany. This view is presented in NATO Under Attack, by von Mellenthin and Sobik, two German officers who faced the Soviets in World War II, and Dr. Stolfi, co-author and professor of European history.[20] Acceptance of this idea would require an adjustment in the way Europeans think, since they stand to lose the most if war comes to the NATO alliance.

Finally if one believes in current U.S. doctrine presented in FM 100-5, then one must conclude that an operational reserve is critical to the success of any campaign or operation in the future. Without an operational reserve with which to affect the outcome of the operation or campaign, the operational commander is nothing more than a

higher level tactician. World War II commanders such as Collins and Bradley cited their lack of reserves during successful campaigns; however, in most campaigns and operations that resulted in strategic gains or losses most often the success or failure can be traced to the presence and proper application of an operational reserve.

Endnotes

[1] Gregory Fontenot, "The Promise of Cobra: The Reality of Manchuria," Military Review, (September 1985), p. 54. Fontenot credits this definition to LTC Harold Winton, School of Advanced Military Studies, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

[2] U.S. Army, Field Manual 101-5-1, Operational Terms and Symbols, (October 1985), p. 1-53.

[3] Trevor N. Dupuy, The Evolution of Weapons and Warfare, (Fairfax: HERO Books, 1984), p. 331.

[4] U.S. Army, Field Manual 100-5, Operations (Final Draft), (October 1985), p. 6-27.

[5] Ibid., p. 9-21.

[6] Russell F. Weigley, Eisenhower's Lieutenants, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), p. 150.

[7] Viktor Suvorov, Inside the Soviet Army, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1982), p. 172.

[8] F.W. von Mellenthin, Panzer Battles: A Study of the Employment of Armor in the Second World War, trans. H. Betzler (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956), p. 215.

[9] U.S. Army, Field Manual 100-15, Corps Operations (Final Draft), (February 1985), p. 3-8.

[10] Suvorov, p. 173.

[11] William DePuy. Generals Balck and von Mellenthin on Tactics: Implications for NATO Military Doctrine (McLean,Va: The BDM Corp., 1980), p. 41.

[12] Ibid., p. 47.

[13] Carl von Clausewitz, On War, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 211.

[14] Battelle, Columbus Laboratories, Tactical Technology Center, Armored Warfare in World War II, Conference featuring F.W. von Mellenthin, 10 May 1979, p. 31.

[15] Battelle, Translation of Taped Conversation with General Herman Balck, 12 January 1979, January 1979, pp. 43-45.

[16] James J. Schneider, "The Retiarian Operational Concept and the Destruction of the Second Echelon," a paper written for U.S. Army Combined Arms Operations Reasearch Activity, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, May 1983.

[17] DePuy, p. 39.

[18] Ibid. p. 40.

[19] Ibid. p. 31.

[20] F.W. von Mellenthin and R.H.S. Stolfi with E. Sobik, NATO Under Attack, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1984), pp. 126-127.

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